

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Representative Bryce Edgmon

Member House Finance

State Capitol

Juneau, Alaska, 99801

March 16, 2011

The Honorable Lisa Jackson, Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington DC 20460

Dear Administrator Jackson,

We are writing to you to express our support for your agency's Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment. As you know, the Bristol Bay region of Alaska and the high quality waters of its lake, river and stream systems produce and sustain high value wild runs of Sockeye, King, and Coho salmon. These wild salmon returning to Bristol Bay number in the tens of millions each year, supporting and sustaining Alaska's richest commercial fishery. These salmon runs are central to the subsistence lifestyle and diverse Native cultures of the Bristol Bay region. Furthermore, Bristol Bay's salmon producing lake and river systems, especially the Mulchatna and Nushagak River drainages as well as the Iliamna Lake and Kvichak River system, support and sustain an unsurpassed highly valuable fishery for salmon, rainbow trout, char, and grayling.

Because low grade high volume metallic bearing sulfide rock formations in the Bristol Bay watershed have attracted interests in developing mega-scale industrial development projects which may pose substantial long-term risks to the water quantity and quality and biological health of the Nushagak/Mulchatna and Iliamna/Kvichak systems, we are very concerned that these areas be proactively protected. Health and safety risks can put the valuable sustainable wild salmon runs at risk. Diversion, dewatering, and impoundment of free flowing streams in the headwaters area will be necessary to build roads, facilities, and provide water for potential mining operations. The risk these activities would pose to the local economy and lifestyle greatly concern the vast majority of residents in the Bristol Bay region.


We are aware that local residents, fishing interests, tribes, and the Bristol Bay Native Corporation within the Bristol Bay region have asked that the Environmental Protection Agency review the suitability of the Nushagak/Mulchatna and Iliamna/Kvichak headwaters area for dredge and fill permits pursuant to section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act. We see the agency's watershed assessment process as a prudent first step in responding to the concerns of the regions local and indigenous people.

Thus, we are in full support of the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to conduct a thorough scientific review of the unique geologic, hydrologic, and environmental resources of the headwaters area, pursuant to

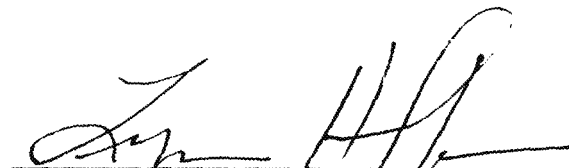
its authority under the Clean Water Act, to determine if dredge and fill activities necessary to develop industrial projects which may be massive in scale will cause unacceptable adverse impacts to water quantity and quality or expose the sustainable salmon and fishery resources in the headwater area and adjoining lakes, rivers or streams to unacceptable risks of significant loss or damage. If this scientific inquiry reveals that development and operation of a large scale open pit mine, disposal of billions of tons of acid-generating waste rock, and other impacts on water quantity and quality are likely to have unacceptable adverse impacts or expose the salmon and other fishing resources to unacceptable risks of significant loss or damage, the agency should designate the headwaters pursuant to section 404(c) as unsuitable for large scale potentially toxic dredge and fill permits. We believe that after this scientific review, EPA will have the information they need to make informed decisions, and would like these decisions to be proactive, so as to provide certainty for all parties as the permitting process moves forward.

Again, we thank you and your staff for your attention on this matter. You have our support.


Sincerely,



Senator Gary Stevens



Senator Lyman Hoffman



Representative Alan Austerman



Representative Bryce Edgmon